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ABSTRACT

A program for the 1982-83 year at Rensselaer Central High School (Indiana) includes procedures for integrating college needs and expectations with those of high school, establishing an inservice program for involving teachers in an "across-the-curriculum" writing program, and proposing a course of study for the school's college preparatory program. The current curriculum guide for the college preparatory program will be modified to include criteria for the selection of works of literature and new composition and vocabulary skills exercises. Guest lectures and field trips to nearby colleges are also proposed for part of the program. A questionnaire will be used to determine the common concerns of high schools and colleges. Given to participants at an NEH summer institute, it revealed a wide range of opinions and differences between high school and college teachers, though both groups agreed that rewriting skills should be an area of greater concern. Inclusion of student responses in the future will increase the questionnaire's validity. An inservice program will be used to confront the problems of parent/teacher/administrator involvement and to encourage all concerned, including students, to participate in an across-the-curriculum writing program. (JL)

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Integration + Implementation + Instruction = Improved Writing Skills

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The NEH Institute in Writing in the Humanities has provided me the opportunity to examine closely those goals which have guided me through many years of teaching the art of composition. Also the Institute has opened up to me an avenue of challenging and interesting new concepts to employ in the classroom in the years to come. I am especially grateful to Elaine Maimon for her acute awareness of composition needs and for her insight in achieving a collaborative workshop toward that goal. Also I would like to thank Ms. Peggy Horodovich for her guidance in helping to set up a workable project and the many members of the NEH Institute with whom I exchanged instructional techniques.

> Today, a staggering 23 million Americans--1 in 5 adults--lack the reading and writing abilities needed to handle the minimal demands of daily living. An additional 30 million are only marginally capable of being productive workers. Thirteen percent of high-school students graduate with the reading and writing skills of sixth graders. More than one third of adults have not completed high school. [1]

Startling statistics, such as the above, greet us in our weekly periodicals. Such facts frighten us as parents. Harrowing figures, like those cited above, intimidate us as teachers! The dilemma is one that not any of us can escape.

The problems that confront all teachers are multifold: inadequate integration between elementary and middle school, inadequate integration between middle school and high school, inadequate integration between high school and college, incomplete and/or inoperable courses of study in language arts/composition skills, and the dedication of teachers of all disciplines to the common cause of adequate communication through writing.

It is the purpose of this paper to set forth a plan which will become operable at the beginning of the 1982-1983 school year. The projected program will include a procedure for integrating college needs and expectations with those of the high school, establishing an in-service program for involving teachers in an "across-the-curriculum" writing program, and proposing

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[1]Stanley N. Wellborn, "Ahead: A Nation of Illiterates?", U.S. News and World Report, (May 17, 1982), page 53.

a course of study for the recent college preparatory program at Rensselaer Central High School. The latter will be consistent with the philosophy of the school system, the guidelines set forth in the present Curriculum Guide, and the needs of the students, as perceived by the administration, the language arts staff, and authorities in the field of language and composition skills.

Three years ago Rensselaer Central High School adopted a college preparatory English class for students of grade twelve. Two years ago another class was opened for members of grade eleven. These groups are voluntary; no screening or testing is administered to determine participation in the classes.

Presently there are two teachers, both of whom have been in charge of the college preparatory program for its duration; and the latter have constructed loosely a sequential course of study for the two year program. There is a definite need to construct a more rigid and formal procedure, one which will be an addendum in keeping with the philosophy of the Rensselaer Central School Corporation and consistent with the present Language Arts Curriculum Guide, K-12. A well structured course of study for these classes will allow for possible turnover in teacher personnel. Also it will create easier adaptability to the program and offer greater insurance toward sustaining continuity. A more immediate and pragmatic concern for the administration is the imminent visit of the North Central Evaluation team in the fall of 1982.

The major areas of academic concern in the college preparatory program are the teaching of composition, the development of vocabulary skills, the reading of selected works of great literature, and the integration of the first three into an acceptable product, in both form and content.

In an examination of the present Curriculum Guide, one can note that provision is made for written composition, as follows:

1. Sentences
2. Narration
3. Steps toward Description and Exposition
4. Description
5. Exposition
6. Summary
7. Paraphrase
8. Precis
9. Paragraph Development
10. Extension or Combination of Methods
11. Book Reports
12. Other Reports
13. Essay Tests
14. Character Sketch
15. Evaluation or criticism
16. Research Paper Techniques
17. Essay
18. Letters and Social Notes

19. Outline

20. Thesis Sentence

21. Correction Paragraphs, Themes, etc.

Additions to the preceding list will include stylistic techniques, rewriting skills, logic and problem solving skills, generation of thoughts, generation of paragraphs, drawing of relationships, expansion of ideas, selection of material, organization of material, sentence combining, and the development of thesis statements. The Curriculum Guide will provide for heuristic exercises and the construction of composition for a specific audience.

The development of vocabulary skills, an integral part of the college preparatory program, will be basically contextual; however, the vocabulary words set forth in the text will also be a part of the vocabulary growth.

The selection of great literature which each college prep student will study will be determined at the beginning of each school year. The teachers will determine these choices from an approved textbook selection list. Therefore, instead of determining exact literary choices in the Curriculum Guide, the staff will establish the literary genra through which students may achieve comprehension, appreciation, and cultural growth.

The remaining sections of the Curriculum Guide do not need revision; they provide the student an overall program in language

arts skills; The latter include word structure, grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, parts of speech, and oral composition. An integration of the preceding skills into the teaching of composition, vocabulary, and literature will be the suggested approach. Learning of these as a "real world" exercise will strengthen understanding and retention.

Absolutely essential to any successful college preparatory program which will help to insure a worthy proposal for suggested changes in the curriculum and ideas for implementation of these concepts on the part of the faculty is an integration of college needs and expectation with those of the high school.

A guest lecture series will present to the student of the college preparatory classes some of the basic writing needs of the college student. These lectures will consist of authorities, not only from the area of composition, but also from othe disciplines. Dr. Charles Kerlin and Dr. Ralph Cappuccilli, members of the NEH Summer Institute in the Teaching of Writing in the Humanities at Beaver College, Glenside, Pennsylvania, and professors at St. Joseph's College, Rensselaer, Indiana, will address the college prep English classes on the topics of anticipated composition needs in college and on the testing of aural skills in oral interpretation. In addition, I shall contact members of the Purdue University English Department to send individuals listed in their Guest Lecutre Series.

The previous lecturers, all primarily involved in language arts development, will forerun the lectures which will follow

in other disciplines. Here the student will be able to experience within the single classroom, the composition and literature class, an across the curriculum approach to composition. Others from St. Joseph's College will present to the classes the needs for writing in their individual areas and will present to the classes models/samples of their expectations and needs: psychology, sociology, economics, political science, and mathematics. (The aforementioned presentations are so essential for in-service faculty involvement, a matter discussed at a later point of this paper, that they will be videotaped for future use.

In addition to guest lectures in various disciplines, I shall propose to the administration a field trip for college prep students to visit freshman composition classes in nearby colleges or universities. In the past these institutions have enthusiastically accepted such a proposal for foreign language classes from Rensselaer Central High School. The benefits for the host schools will be twofold; they will be able to display their program and their facilities to potential students, and they will be able to present firsthand some of the teaching techniques of composition skills. Our students, through actual experience, will be an integral part of the integration of the skills presented to them in high school with some of those expected of them in college.

A natural outgrowth of the preceding proposal will be a questionnaire sent to the graduates of our 1983 class to determine,

as much as possible, the efficacy of our program of integration. The Language Arts Department throughout the year will establish collaboratively the questions to be included.

Since we have a limited number of institutions of higher learning in the immediate vicinity of Rensselaer, Indiana, I am planning to prepare a questionnaire which I shall send to other colleges in the five state area: Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, and Kentucky. The inquiries of this questionnaire will contain a breakdown of the concerns common to the needs of both the high school and the colleges. Their content will reflect some of the questions we used in a similar survey several years ago. In addition, it will address other vital concerns which members of the NEH Summer Writing Institute have contributed.

In order for the reader to understand more fully how this procedure evolved, an explanation in necessary. Each workshop participant received a preliminary questionnaire which listed crucial concerns for the teaching of composition. These important writing skills arose in the content of the lectures of the NEH Summer Institute, as well as in small group collaborative learning discussions. Participating respondees ranked eighteen areas on a scale of 1 to 5 in the following manner:

1 - Superior

2 - Above Average

3 - Average

4 - Below Average

5 - Not Acceptable

In addition, they listed the five areas which represented to them the greatest need for concentration by the secondary schools. Finally, they indicated skills which were lacking from the list and which they considered important. The questionnaire revealed an assessment, even though from a limited number of responses (due to the restricted number of NEH Summer Institute participants), of a somewhat wide range of opinions; for those who participated in the survey were affiliates of a wide range of institutions of higher learning. This diversity was geographic in its scope, as well as in the types of colleges or universities represented: city colleges/universities, state colleges/universities, community colleges, and private colleges. Another strength which contributed to a wider comprehension of the assessment of needs between high school and college was that high school teachers participated, thus presenting, on a different level, opinions on the same subject.

Following is a breakdown of that survey. The figure in the left column represents the average score of teachers of colleges and universities; the figure in the right column is an average of the responses of high school teachers. The list is prepared in numerical rank from highest to lowest according to the evaluation of those who responded.

	Col. - Univ.	H. Sch.
1. Creativity	2.8	2
2. Development of Thesis Statement	3	2
3. Selection of Material	3.1	2.25
4. Constructing for a Specific Audience	3.18	3.25
5. Syntax	3.18	2
6. Sentence Combining	3.27	2.25
7. Generation of Words	3.27	2.5
8. Generation of Information	3.27	2
9. Expansion of Ideas	3.27	2.5
10. Organization of Material	3.3	2.25
11. Logic & Problem Solving	3.36	3.5
12. Drawing of Relationships	3.4	2.75
13. Style	3.45	2.25
14. Mechanics	3.5	2.5
15. Paragraphing	3.5	2.25
16. Clarity	3.5	3
17. Editing Ability	3.59	3.25
18. Rewriting Skills	4	3.75

It is interesting to note that among those who responded from colleges or universities, only one score is above the

average and only one below the average. However, if one considers 3 as a totally average grade, then many of the scores extend into a wide average minus range. Perhaps a more interesting aspect when viewing the chart overall is the fact that high school teachers responding placed thirteen of the categories above tha average instead of two.

At this point, one cannot help but ask himself several questions concerning the preceding data. First, what does the word <u>average</u> denote? Is it the norm for what exists, or is it the norm for what we anticipate or desire. Second, is mediocrity consistent with this nation's goals?

An examination of the results of the chart reveals to me the following generalizations.

1. There is an inconsistency with the STARTLING statement of the opening of this paper. Rather than a nation staggeringly below the average, we are a nation moderately below the average, a fact nevertheless disheartening. The preceding figures force us to face the question: "Is average minus sufficient for us to articulate sufficiently to move ahead, or to maintain our status quo?"
2. The figures show at the top of the scale <u>creativity</u>, an innate quality of potential.

At the close of the scale lie rewriting skills, a necessary component for honing the creative ability. The former represents for me an optimistic hope, for through its careful instruction, we can hope to achieve the latter's potential. Numbers 1 and 18 of the questionnaire seem to say, "Hey, teachers, we have students who possess great potential. Rewriting skills are a teachable, viable means to the realization of the creative potential."

3. The tremendous discrepancy between the responses of high school and college members who responded is a definite indication, I feel, that there is a distinct need for better communication between the two to establish needs, expectations, and workable avenues of communication to remediate the first two.
4. The fact that both high school teachers and college personnel selected rewriting skills as the area which needs the greatest work is a basic bond which will serve as a strong springboard to leap into immediate action.

In another portion of the questions to which the participants responded is that which asks the respondees to list the five areas which represent to them the greatest need for consideration by the secondary school. Among the college teachers responding, all eighteen received at least one mention; however, there were some which received multiple responses. They were: editing, syntax, rewriting, logic and problem solving skills, expansion of ideas, problem solving skills, development of thesis statement, generation of words, drawing of relationships, organization of material, and the development of the thesis statement. The four areas which received multiple responses from the high school teachers were organization, drawing of relationships, rewriting skills, and constructing for a specific audience.

Among the college teachers three areas received an equal number of votes for their importance: logic and problem solving, expansion of ideas, and organization of material. Among the high school teachers one area far exceeded the others: organization of materials. The common concern of the two groups for the latter is a salutary one.

In order to make the questionnaire a more valid one, I plan to involve others in responding to its eighteen points. During the 1982-1983 school year senior students will respond to the same set of questions, as well as a group of

students from St. Joseph's College. The latter two groups will evaluate the samples according to their assessment of needs, as well as to their instruction during the preceding eleven or twelve years of school.

Based on the aforementioned needs and data, one must face the question of how best to confront the problem(s) of parent/teacher/administration involvement. An in-service program that incorporates all of the latter in its planning and implementation stages is one which will best serve the Rensselaer community. The question of how most naturally arises.

The first step must lie with the administration, for it is there that the official "go ahead" lies. With this official imprimatur, the in-service training program begins. I propose to set up an early meeting with the department co-ordinators in history, mathematics, science, and language arts, the department which I represent. Although there are many more disciplines within the school corporation, these are the only ones which have been officially designated as such with a department co-ordinator in charge. At this first meeting, I shall present them with the pressing need of "across the curriculum" involvement in composition instruction. (The latter involvement of other departments does not seem to me an insurmountable problem.) What does appear as

a more pressing need is the implementation, due to financial need, of the necessary teachers' meetings and the acquisition of knowledgeable professionals to serve as conference leaders.

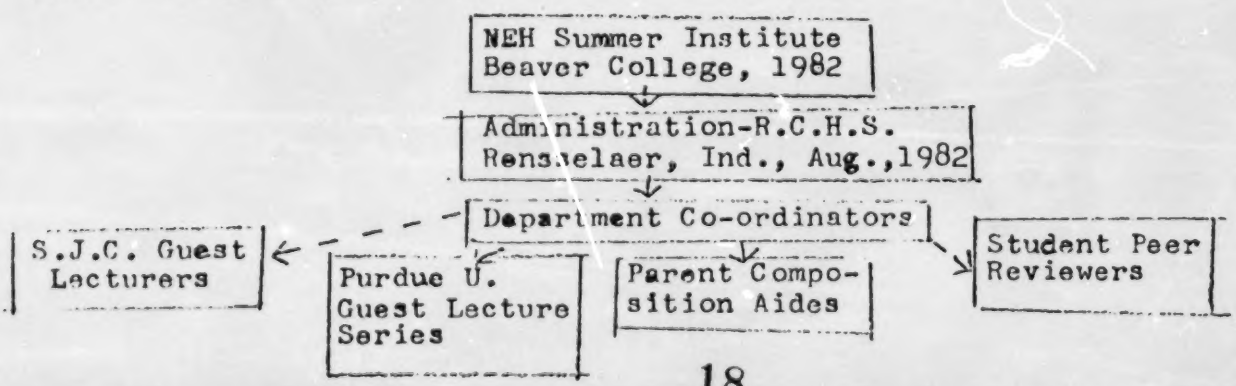
Because of the aforementioned lack of funds, another avenue to success of our in-service program must lie with our community and the surrounding areas. One of these is St. Joseph's College, with whom the community shares a communal bond. If during the year we are able to draw upon the talents of the professors of various disciplines to speak to our college preparatory students concerning the needs and the expertise necessary to successful articulation in written composition in the area which each professor represents, we shall be able to videotape each of these. Not only shall we be able to prepare a bank of these for future student consumption, but also we shall be able to employ these videotapes as a means of instruction for the high school department co-ordinators, who, in turn, will be responsible for involving members of their individual departments in more appropriate written assignments.

Once the "across the curriculum" concern has arisen among the administration and teaching staff, the parents must become involved. Presently a group of volunteer parents works each day with students who seek remedial help in various

subjects. Some of these students the teachers recommend; Others of these students volunteer. These concerned parents do an excellent job. (Many of them are certified teachers.) So deep is their concern for the educational welfare of our students that they would serve as an excellent corps in helping the English Department teachers to achieve the goals of composition excellence. Rather than peer readers, they might become understanding adult readers.

To make a truly effective program to aid in student writing skills "across the curriculum", it seems to me that the use of capable students is an essential. Through the tutoring of our English staff and through the talents of those in the community, we shall try to train students who will serve as peer reviewers in composition assignments. The latter would most naturally arise from the recommendation of the department co-ordinators of the various disciplines. Our administration's present policy of granting some academic credit for services such as office help throughout the school year should serve as an enticement for potential student help.

The following chart is a representation of the procedure which I have proposed:



A question any reader of this paper should ask is, "Why do you think the proposed suggestions will work?" I know it because I have seen the excitement of students whom I have taught when they have produced a product worthy of appreciation. I know it because I believe in the deep concern of English teachers across the nation. I know it because others believe as I do. Stanley N. Wellborn presents to us some of these views:

> Another promising approach is known as 'writing across the curriculum,' which incorporates writing assignments in all subjects. Explains James Howard, co-author of Empty Pages, a book that examines writing competence in schools and society:
>
> 'If the kind of literacy writing represents is going to improve, writing cannot be taught either as a separate subject in the curriculum or as the exclusive province of the English department.'
>
> Many educators say that writing ability is poised for improvement at all student levels as these reforms take effect. Above all, they say, there is a greater determination among school officials and teachers to insure competence in writing -- perhaps the most basic and important of the three R's.
>
> As Richard C. Marius, director of expository writing at Harvard, frequently tells his students, 'Don't ever say you know it but can't write it. There's no way to separate the two.' [2]

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[2]Stanley N. Wellborn, "Why Johnny Can't Write - And What's Being Done," U.S. News and World Report, (March 16, 1981), p. 48.

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